

**LOVING CARE:** Dr Ingrid Visser with a stranded orca at Taiharuru in 2004.  
PICTURE / MICHAEL CUNNINGHAM



# Orca champion gets national recognition

by André Hueber

Northland's renowned orca expert Ingrid Visser has become the first woman to receive a national award for her contribution to the environment.

Dr Visser was awarded the Wyland Foundation/Dive New Zealand Magazine Recognition Award at the New Zealand Underwater Association's annual general meeting in Mount Maunganui earlier this month.

Dive New Zealand owner Dave Moran said it was decided in 2002 to come up with an award which acknowledged unsung heroes of the environment.

"There's lots of people who contribute to the environment for no monetary award. They are just passionate about what they are doing."

He said benefits of their efforts flowed through to the marine environment.

Mr Moran said Dr Visser's father Frits first nominated her for the award six years ago.

"There were a few other people getting long in the tooth and we thought we'd better give it to them first before they drop off the perch," he said.

Dr Visser was chosen for her dedication over the years, and



**DESERVED:** Dr Visser with the Wyland Award, the first woman to receive it.

because she was a "tough, gutsy lady", Mr Moran said.

He said: "Jean-Michel Cousteau was here recently. I was catching up with him and he said 'Ingrid's in the Hauraki Gulf with a disoriented orca'. She was protecting it to ensure it made it safely out of the busy harbour."

"I went down to Tank Farm — it was a bitter night and at 10.30pm I rang her on her

cellphone.

"I saw a little boat in the distance and said 'what the hell are you doing? Every other man in Auckland is tucked up in bed' — but she was doing it because she loves the animals."

Dr Visser's trophy was designed by American marine artist Robert Wyland and shows a blue whale baby calf beside its mother. Mr Wyland is known for

his prolific work painting marine life scenes around the world and as an advocate for marine conservation. Previous recipients of the Wyland Award include marine biologist and photographer Dr Roger Grace (2009) and underwater explorer, researcher and documentary maker, Northlander Wade Doak (2005).

Mr Doak said the award was recognition of the long-term work which Dr Visser had undertaken.

He said: "She's a self-starter, a pioneer, and she's broken new ground. She's prepared to jump in a car and take off anywhere, anytime."

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